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Community-Led Vigilance in Peacebuilding: Residents' Experiences, Challenges, and Strategies In Early Warning Systems

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ABSTRACT

Amid increasing concerns about local security and conflict prevention, community-based approaches have become essential in strengthening grassroots peacebuilding initiatives. This study explored the experiences and perceptions of residents in selected barangays in Lanao del Norte regarding community-led vigilance and early warning systems as mechanisms for peacebuilding. Using Clark Moustakas' transcendental phenomenological research design, the study aimed to capture the essence of residents' roles, motivations, challenges, and collaborative strategies in sustaining community security. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with residents actively participating in vigilance initiatives, with data saturation reached at 11 participants. Thematic analysis was employed to identify patterns of engagement, moral responsibility, and cooperative action. Results revealed six emergent themes, namely: residents as frontline defenders of community security; vigilance as a shared moral and civic responsibility; active engagement in early warning systems; challenges in community-based vigilance; vigilance as a tool for peacebuilding; and collaborative strategies for early warning. The study further revealed the integration of moral, social, and operational dimensions of community-led vigilance, emphasizing its role in long-term peacebuilding. It is recommended that capacity-building, resource support, psychological assistance, and youth engagement be strengthened to sustain community initiatives.

Keywords: Armed Conflict; Civic Responsibility; Community-Based Vigilance; Community-Led Vigilance; Peacebuilding; Security; Early Warning Systems; Prevention; Qualitative; Vigilance; Philippines.

1.0. Introduction

The increasing prevalence of armed conflict and community-level insecurity has underscored the need for proactive mechanisms such as early warning systems to prevent violence and safeguard lives. Among these, Community-Based Early Warning Systems (CBEWS) have gained recognition for their participatory approach, positioning local residents as central actors in identifying, monitoring, and responding to emerging threats. Unlike centralized systems, community-based approaches leverage local knowledge, social relationships, and contextual familiarity, enabling faster detection of risks that may not be immediately visible to external authorities ((Mark & Braokubo 2026; Fajrillah et al., 2024; Macherera & Chimbari, 2016). Empirical evidence supports this, as seen in South Sudan and Nigeria, where community-driven systems enhanced early detection and response to conflict (Opongo & Kawuondi, 2025; Bisetsa et al., 2024; Nwohu et al., 2023). However, despite their effectiveness, many early warning systems remain focused on technical and institutional aspects, often overlooking the lived experiences of community members and limiting their application in conflict-sensitive contexts (Ehimiyen, 2024). In the Philippines, particularly in conflict-affected areas, community-based initiatives have shown promise but continue to face challenges related to resources, coordination, and sustainability ((Barbelet & Mayhew2025; Muggah & Whitlock, 2022).

This study is anchored in three complementary theoretical perspectives that explain how community-based vigilance operates within early warning systems. Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) Theory

emphasizes the active involvement of residents as equal partners in identifying risks and implementing solutions, enhancing relevance and sustainability (Israel et al., 1998; Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008; Duke, 2020). Social Capital Theory (SCT) highlights the role of trust, networks, and cooperation in enabling collective action and effective information sharing within communities (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000; Lin et al., 2021). Meanwhile, Community Resilience Theory (CRT) explains how communities adapt, respond, and sustain vigilance efforts despite challenges, emphasizing the importance of leadership, participation, and access to resources (Norris et al., 2008; Saja et al., 2021; Burrows et al., 2023). Guided by these frameworks, community-led vigilance is conceptualized as a multi-dimensional process where residents act as frontline defenders, engage actively in monitoring and reporting, and uphold vigilance as a shared moral and civic responsibility, while also navigating challenges such as limited resources and coordination constraints (Nwodo et al., 2025; Hogue, 2023; Mhandara, 2024).

Given these considerations, this sought to understand how residents perceive and perform their roles, the challenges they encounter, and the strategies they employ to enhance system effectiveness. By focusing on the perspectives of community members, the study addresses existing knowledge and methodological gaps, particularly the limited qualitative exploration of lived experiences in early warning systems. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of more inclusive, participatory, and sustainable approaches to conflict prevention, highlighting the critical role of community participation as a cornerstone of peacebuilding and local security governance (Saraiva & Erfe, 2023; De Coning et al., 2025).

1.1. Study Objectives

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of residents involved in community-led vigilance within community-based early warning systems for peacebuilding. Specifically, the study aimed to:

1) Examine how residents perceived their roles in community-led vigilance for peacebuilding.
2) Explore the lived experiences of residents participating in community-based early warning systems.
3) Identify the challenges encountered by residents in engaging in early warning and conflict prevention activities.
4) Determine how residents perceived the contribution of community-led vigilance to peacebuilding and conflict prevention.
5) Describe the strategies and practices identified by residents as effective in enhancing community-based early warning systems.

2.0. Methods

This study employed a qualitative research design utilizing a transcendental phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of residents engaged in community-led vigilance and early warning systems for peacebuilding. The research was conducted in a selected barangay in Lanao del Norte, Philippines, a remote and conflict-prone area characterized by security threats and active community-based monitoring structures.

Participants consisted of 11 residents (from an initial 15, with data saturation achieved), including barangay officials, community watch members, and opinion leaders who were actively involved in Community-Based Early Warning and Action (CBVEWA) initiatives. Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews using validated interview guides, conducted in a private setting with informed consent and ethical clearance from the university ethics committee. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed to ensure accuracy. Data analysis followed Clark Moustakas' transcendental phenomenological method, involving epoche (bracketing), phenomenological reduction, clustering of significant statements into themes, imaginative variation, and synthesis of textural and structural descriptions to derive the essence of participants' experiences. NVivo software was used to facilitate systematic coding and thematic analysis, ensuring rigor, credibility, and transparency throughout the research process, while ethical standards such as confidentiality, anonymity, and compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012 were strictly observed.

3.0. Results and Discussion

This study examined the lived experiences of residents engaged in community-led vigilance within a selected barangay in Lanao del Norte, a geographically remote and conflict-prone area near the boundary with Lanao del Sur. The community is characterized by diverse socio-cultural backgrounds and is organized into several puroks where localized monitoring and communication systems are implemented. Within this setting, residents actively participate in Community-Based Early Warning and Action (CBVEWA) groups, functioning as key actors in identifying, reporting, and responding to potential threats. The participants, composed of 11 residents including barangay officials, community watch members, and opinion leaders, provided rich narratives that illuminate how vigilance is practiced, experienced, and sustained at the grassroots level. Their accounts reveal a complex interplay of responsibility, cooperation, risk perception, and resilience, reflecting both the strengths and limitations of community-based early warning systems.

Analysis of the data generated six interrelated themes that collectively capture the essence of community-led vigilance: (1) residents as frontline defenders of community security, (2) vigilance as a shared moral and civic responsibility, (3) active engagement in early warning systems, (4) challenges in community-based vigilance, (5) vigilance as a tool for peacebuilding, and (6) collaborative strategies for early warning. These themes highlight how residents navigate their roles within a context of uncertainty and potential threat, balancing personal safety with collective responsibility. The integration of participant narratives with existing literature provides a deeper understanding of how community-based vigilance operates not only as a security mechanism but also as a social and moral practice embedded in everyday life.

3.1. Residents as Frontline Defenders of Community Security

This theme revealed how residents actively take on the role of protecting their community, not merely as observers but as hands-on participants in maintaining peace and order. Participants described themselves as vigilant and proactive, constantly monitoring their surroundings, reporting unusual activities, and coordinating with authorities. They also engage in conflict mediation and help ensure community safety during tense situations. These actions

show a strong sense of personal responsibility and accountability toward their neighbors and the wider community. Studies suggest that local volunteers and community members are often better positioned to detect potential threats because of their familiarity with the environment and social networks (Nwodo et al., 2025; Allen & Fraser, 2022).

Participants shared experiences of leadership and active roles in organizing community-based security efforts. One noted:

"I take a leadership role in our barangay to ensure safety, coordinating closely with our village head, the municipal government, and the military to report any threats immediately." (P1)

Others described their formal roles in local governance and peacekeeping:

"I became a Kagawad because I want to help the people in our community… I help out during local occasions and events as part of my duties, and I have even settled disputes between people to keep the peace." (P3)

These accounts show that residents often go beyond their expected civic duties. They serve as the first line of defense in detecting and responding to risks, helping prevent incidents from escalating. The presence of organized groups like the barangay patrol (BPAT) ensures coordination, preparedness, and faster responses during emergencies. One member explained:

"As a dedicated member of the BPAT… we look out for one another and report everything to our superiors… By staying loyal to the community and reporting suspicious activity early, we ensure that the tragedies of the past never return." (P5)

"*We guard our barangay so that in case there is a problem, we must inform our government. Based on what I see here, if ever a shootout happens, we tell the civilians not to run… We were given radios and equipment by our government to help the civilians, which is highly beneficial because if they see something before any trouble starts, we can immediately prepare for it." (P4)*

Residents also emphasized the value of collective monitoring and shared responsibility. Their intimate knowledge of the community allows them to spot unusual activities or outsiders quickly, strengthening early detection of potential threats. Studies confirm that such community-driven vigilance improves the effectiveness of early warning systems by integrating local insights and real-time information (Hoag-Fordjour, 2023; Kamruzzaman et al., 2024; Véliz, 2024).

This suggests that residents are essential actors in community security, not just recipients of protection but active contributors to peace and order. Their involvement demonstrates that effective early warning and vigilance systems rely on local participation, coordination, and shared responsibility. This underscores the need for policymakers and local authorities to support, train, and equip residents, recognizing their role as a cornerstone of community safety. Encouraging such grassroots participation can strengthen trust, social cohesion, and resilience, ultimately enhancing the community's capacity to prevent and respond to conflict.

3.2. Vigilance as a Shared Moral and Civic Responsibility

This theme explicit that vigilance in the community was not merely a security practice but also a moral and civic duty shared among residents. Participants consistently described their engagement as a responsibility to protect others, maintain peace, and ensure collective welfare. Their responses indicated that residents understood their role as more than informal observers, they perceived themselves as key contributors to community safety, motivated by a sense of duty, ethics, and concern for others. This aligns with previous research showing that participation in early warning and peacebuilding initiatives is often driven by shared moral commitment and accountability to the community rather than formal enforcement alone (Hogue, 2023; Ivasiuc et al., 2022; Buckinx, 2024). Several participants described acting despite personal fear, demonstrating moral courage and prioritization of the common good over personal comfort. One participant shared:

"*Normally, I will do whatever I can to help, and I tell the people here to also contribute to the betterment of our place and listen to advice… Facing challenges, I would naturally be scared, but I will still report incidents to the barangay captain for the good of our community." (P6)*

This response can be understood in light of the participants' proximity to past disturbances in the barangay and their awareness of potential threats in a secluded area near Lanao del Sur. Their willingness to act despite fear reflects a combination of lived experiences, personal accountability, and the social expectation that residents protect their neighbors. It also indicates that vigilance is not only an action but a reflection of internalized moral values, where fear does not inhibit participation because the community's safety takes precedence.

Participants also emphasized collaboration and the importance of value formation in sustaining peace. One shared:

"Whenever bad things happen, we hold meetings here in our barangay and work together to find a solution… We also need to teach the children that they are not allowed to hold guns and must always be taught good values." (P10)

Their responses show that residents view vigilance as an ongoing, multi-generational effort. The emphasis on educating children and holding regular community meetings demonstrates an understanding that peace and security are not solely reactive but also preventative. Their behavior reflects a recognition that cultivating civic values, trust, and cooperation within the community contributes to long-term stability. The collaborative efforts also indicate that residents rely on social cohesion and mutual trust to ensure collective vigilance, a concept supported by social capital studies, where relationships, trust, and networks strengthen the effectiveness of community action (Carmen et al., 2022; Sulaiman et al., 2024).

Furthermore, participants described systematic monitoring and honesty as central to their community practice:

"I made it my duty to ensure the safety of my family and relatives… I constantly encourage them to help guard our community so that peace continues… Our strategy is to always tell the truth and strictly guard every purok to ensure no unauthorized person can enter, maintaining our peace." (P11)

This statement illustrates that residents see vigilance as both ethical and operational. The insistence on honesty reflects an understanding that trust within the community is vital for timely and accurate reporting of potential

threats. Structured monitoring of different areas demonstrates how residents organize themselves to prevent unauthorized access and maintain control over local security. Their responses indicate that past experiences with threats and the need for early warning motivate them to adopt systematic and proactive approaches, rather than reacting only after incidents occur.

It indicates that community vigilance is deeply embedded as a moral and civic responsibility, practiced through courage, collaboration, and the consistent reinforcement of shared values. Residents' responses reveal that their participation is shaped by prior experiences, awareness of potential threats, and the ethical norms of the community. By fostering civic responsibility, structured coordination, and intergenerational value transmission, community-led early warning systems become more sustainable and effective. These insights suggest that policies or programs aimed at enhancing peacebuilding should integrate ethical education, trust-building activities, and participatory practices to strengthen community resilience and cohesion.

3.3. Active Engagement in Early Warning Systems

This theme emphasizes that residents' engagement in early warning systems is not limited to observing potential threats but involves active, coordinated, and collective participation. Participants consistently described their roles as essential to monitoring, reporting, and responding to risks in real time, demonstrating that community safety is a shared responsibility. Their responses indicate that effective early warning relies on the combination of human vigilance, technological tools, and structured coordination with local leaders and government authorities. This aligns with prior research emphasizing that community engagement improves the accuracy, timeliness, and sustainability of early warning systems (Maria Luisa, 2025; Barbelet & Mayhew, 2025; Kamau et al., 2022).

Several participants highlighted the importance of working closely with authorities to ensure swift responses. One shared:

"I coordinate closely with our village head, municipal government, and the military to report any threats immediately." (P1)

This response illustrates that residents view themselves as active intermediaries between local knowledge and formal security mechanisms. Their engagement reflects lived experiences of past disturbances in the area and a recognition that timely reporting and coordination can prevent escalation of threats. It also shows that early warning is not solely dependent on technology or institutions but relies on the ethical commitment and accountability of community members.

Participants further emphasized communication tools and regular meetings as critical components of early warning. Participant 10 stated:

"Having a radio contributes 100% to our safety because it provides immediate assistance in informing our colleagues," while Participant 2 added, "Just a radio… we have cellphones too. We just hold meetings." (P10)

Their statements reveal that combining modern tools with structured social mechanisms enhances responsiveness and coordination. Similarly, Participant 4 noted the benefit of government-provided equipment:

"We were given radios and equipment… if they see something before any trouble starts, we can immediately prepare for it." (P4)

Residents also stressed the collective nature of early warning, mutual support, and proactive reporting. Participant 5 explained:

"We look out for one another and report everything to our superiors… By staying loyal to the community and reporting suspicious activity early, we ensure that the tragedies of the past never return," (P5)

while Participant 6 noted,

"Alerting the people early is a massive help to our community so that conflicts do not escalate." (P6)

These responses suggest that early warning is sustained not only by monitoring and tools but also by social cohesion, trust, and shared accountability. Coordination among BPAT members and immediate reporting further enhance the system's reliability and effectiveness. This supports the idea that participatory approaches allow communities to contribute local knowledge, strengthen coordination, and develop a sense of ownership over security systems (Baram & Ben Israel, 2025; Mbuvi & Mulu, 2026; Sullivan, 2025).

Overall, active engagement in early warning systems demonstrates that community-based vigilance is a proactive, collaborative, and continuous effort. Residents' involvement through monitoring, communication, and rapid response ensures that potential risks are detected early, coordination is efficient, and collective responsibility is reinforced. These insights suggest that programs aimed at enhancing early warning should prioritize participatory practices, training in communication and reporting, and the provision of technological resources to support sustained, community-driven vigilance.

3.4. Challenges in Community-Based Vigilance

The various difficulties and constraints experienced by residents in sustaining community-based vigilance. While participants demonstrated strong commitment to maintaining peace and order, their narratives revealed emotional, physical, and resource-related challenges. These included fear, fatigue, past experiences of displacement, and limited logistical support for community security efforts. Despite these obstacles, residents continued to engage in vigilance activities, reflecting resilience and dedication. Overall, the findings show that community-based vigilance is both demanding and complex, requiring continuous effort from those involved, which aligns with Community Resilience Theory (CRT) emphasizing that local capacity, social support, and adaptive processes sustain communities under stress (Norris et al., 2008; Saja et al., 2021).

Participants' responses indicate that fear remains a significant challenge, particularly during uncertain or threatening situations. One participant shared:

"Facing challenges, I would naturally be scared, but I will still report incidents to the barangay captain for the good of our community." (P6)

Another participant noted:

"At first, we were really scared… Facing challenges, you really cannot avoid feeling afraid sometimes." (P11)

Additionally, one participant recalled:

"We once had to evacuate because we saw everyone running and joined them out of fear." (P3)

These statements suggest that fear is a natural response to potential danger and uncertainty within the community. However, residents continue to fulfill their responsibilities despite these emotions, demonstrating courage and commitment. This aligns with Social Capital Theory (SCT), which highlights that trust, cooperation, and shared networks support collective action, allowing individuals to persevere despite personal risks (Ehimiyen, 2024; Nwohu et al., 2023).

Moreover, participants highlighted the impact of past security threats and instability on their experiences. One participant noted:

"Before, whenever there were candidates or elections, we were often forced to evacuate." (P2)

This reflects how historical experiences of conflict and displacement shape current perceptions of safety and vigilance. Such experiences contribute to heightened alertness while also increasing anxiety and stress. The memory of past disruptions reinforces the importance of maintaining security while simultaneously reminding residents of potential risks. As such, vigilance is influenced not only by present conditions but also by lived experiences, a concept supported by Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR), which acknowledges that residents' knowledge and experience are central to sustaining community initiatives (Barbelet & Mayhew, 2025; Muggah & Whitlock, 2022)

The physical demands of maintaining vigilance were also emphasized. One participant stated:

"We stay up late to guard our barangay, which is really difficult because whenever something happens, we are truly the first ones to face the challenges." (P4)

This underscores the demanding nature of community-based security efforts, particularly for frontline patrol and monitoring activities. Sustained vigilance can lead to fatigue, stress, and reduced well-being, demonstrating that physical and operational challenges are integral to understanding the burden of community participation.

In addition, participants pointed out the lack of sufficient resources and support as a key challenge. One participant shared:

"To sustain our peace, I advocate for better support for our peacekeepers, specifically requesting IDs, flashlights, and radios…" (P5)

Limited access to basic equipment can hinder effective community security efforts. This aligns with CRT's focus on adaptive capacity, which emphasizes that access to resources and institutional support is critical for resilient community systems (Bisetsa et al., 2024; Fajrillah et al., 2024). Despite these challenges, participants expressed resilience and a strong sense of collective responsibility.

Participants share their experienced challenges, as they stated:

"Because of this, I tell the people here that we must help each other with our problems…" (P9)

"This state of security does not negatively affect me; in fact, as a mother, I am motivated…" (P1)

These responses suggest that social cohesion and shared responsibility sustain community-based vigilance even under challenging conditions. The findings indicate that the combination of bonding social capital and moral commitment motivates residents to continue their duties, reflecting SCT principles (Sakamoto, 2024; Putnam, 2000).

The reveals that community-based vigilance is accompanied by multiple challenges that affect residents emotionally, physically, and operationally. Fear emerged as a central issue, particularly in situations involving uncertainty or potential threats. However, participants' willingness to act despite fear demonstrates resilience and a strong sense of civic duty, consistent with Community Resilience Theory (Humann, 2022). Emotional responses did not weaken participation; rather, they coexisted with a commitment to collective safety, showing how individual courage and social support operate together to maintain vigilance (Niu et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the influence of past experiences, such as evacuations during conflicts, highlights the long-term impact of insecurity on community behavior. Historical threats contributed to heightened awareness and preparedness but also reinforced anxiety and stress. These experiences align with CBPR principles, which recognize that residents lived knowledge and prior encounters shape their participation and decision-making in community-led initiatives (Rosa et al., 2025; Sawchuk, 2022). Addressing these emotional and practical dimensions may require trauma-informed approaches to support residents while sustaining their engagement in vigilance.

The physical demands associated with community-based security also presented challenges. Night patrols and immediate response to incidents required sustained energy, alertness, and courage, which could lead to fatigue or reduced effectiveness. These findings underscore the importance of supporting the well-being of community members and providing institutional backing, reflecting CRT's emphasis on local capacities, resources, and adaptive processes (Burrows et al., 2023; Summers et al., 2024).

Resource limitations further emphasize the need for external support. Access to equipment such as radios, flashlights, and identification materials enhances the effectiveness of vigilance and early warning systems. This demonstrates the interplay between social cohesion, moral responsibility, and practical support, reflecting SCT and CRT perspectives, where trust, networks, and capacity-building strengthen collective action (Rosa et al., 2025; Carmen et al., 2022).

Despite these obstacles, the findings reveal strong resilience, social cohesion, and collective efficacy within the community. Residents continued to cooperate, support one another, and remain committed to peace and order. Their actions suggest that vigilance is sustained not only by individual courage but also by shared responsibility, trust, and collaboration. The study implies that community-based initiatives should integrate moral, social, and structural support to maintain effective early warning and peacebuilding systems. Enhancing resources, training, and institutional collaboration can further strengthen community resilience, ensuring that vigilance remains sustainable and effective in the long term.

3.5. Vigilance as a Tool for Peacebuilding

Vigilance in the community serves not only as a mechanism for maintaining security but also as a proactive instrument for promoting peace and social cohesion. Participants described their roles as extending beyond threat prevention to fostering harmony, cooperation, and shared responsibility among residents. Through continuous monitoring, communication, and engagement, they contribute to a stable environment where trust and collaboration are nurtured. One participant explained,

"By working together with officials, residents, and the government we have transformed our community from a place of uncertainty into a secured environment where peace is actively protected and sustained" (P1).

This reflects the notion from Community Resilience Theory (Marrone et al., 2022) that resilience emerges from coordinated efforts and collective capacity within a community, emphasizing that peace is actively constructed rather than passively experienced (Kitonga, & Ichani, 2025)

Local knowledge and participation were described as vital elements for effective peacebuilding. Residents' familiarity with their surroundings allows them to identify risks early and respond appropriately, ensuring that potential conflicts are managed before they escalate. As one participant stated,

"The people are the ones who provide support because they are the ones who know their area" (P2).

Social Capital Theory helps explain this dynamic, showing how trust, networks, and shared knowledge facilitate cooperation and enhance community efficacy (Saijo, 2022; Carmen et al., 2022). By drawing on personal connections and contextual awareness, residents strengthen both the monitoring system and social harmony. Community vigilance also functions as a tool for conflict resolution and social regulation. Participants frequently described mediating disputes and fostering positive interactions as part of their responsibilities. One participant shared,

"I help out during local occasions and events as part of my duties, and I have even settled disputes between people to keep the peace" (P3).

These practices demonstrate that peacebuilding is embedded in daily community interactions and not solely dependent on formal authorities. Engaging in these informal processes promotes social cohesion and reinforces norms that maintain order and cooperation. Preventive strategies were equally emphasized, especially in guiding vulnerable groups and providing early warnings (De Coning et al., 2025; Handoko, & Rahayu, 2025). Participants stressed teaching youth and women to avoid harmful behaviors and to focus on education, alongside notifying the community of potential threats. As one participant shared,

"Alerting the people early is a massive help to our community so that conflicts do not escalate" (P6).

Such approaches align with the principles of Community-Based Participatory Research, which value local input in designing solutions that reflect the lived realities of residents. By combining education, early intervention, and active engagement, the community establishes a proactive framework that addresses both immediate risks and the underlying causes of conflict.

Through these coordinated, value-driven efforts, vigilance becomes a central mechanism for peacebuilding. It integrates security functions with social development, emphasizing collaboration, local knowledge, and preventive action. Residents act not just as protectors of their environment but as agents of resilience, shaping a community culture where peace is actively maintained. This demonstrates that sustainable security and social harmony are co-created through the collective agency of community members, supported by networks, trust, and shared responsibility.

3.6. Collaborative Strategies for Early Warning

This theme plays a crucial role in ensuring effective early warning systems within the community. Participants described close coordination between residents, local officials, and government agencies as central to timely detection and response to potential threats.

Participants emphasized that security is strengthened when communication, coordination, and shared responsibility are actively practiced. Their responses reveal that early warning is not an individual effort but a collective process that relies on cooperation at multiple levels. Through coordinated actions, communities are able to detect, assess, and respond to potential threats more efficiently. As they shared.

"I coordinate closely with our village head, municipal government, and the military to report any threats immediately" (P1).

"I want to encourage everyone to immediately inform barangay officials if they hear or see anything suspicious" (P3).

This structured network of communication reflects the principles of Social Capital Theory (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988), which emphasizes how trust, networks, and reciprocal relationships enable communities to achieve collective goals.

By leveraging these connections, residents can share information quickly, mobilize resources, and act efficiently, ensuring that vigilance is both comprehensive and responsive. The integration of communication tools and regular meetings further supports collaborative early warning practices. Radios, mobile phones, and community gatherings allow for real-time reporting, collective planning, and evaluation. One participant noted,

"Just a radio, that is what we use for monitoring and reporting to the captain. We have cellphones too. We just hold meetings" (P2).

"Having a radio contributes 100% to our safety because it provides immediate assistance in informing our colleagues" (P10).

This reflects Community Resilience Theory (Norris et al., 2008), which posits that resilient communities rely on adaptive capacities, coordinated actions, and resource access to respond effectively to crises. Through combining technology with continuous engagement, residents can adapt quickly to changing situations, maintaining the functionality and sustainability of early warning systems (Saraiva, & Erfe, 2023). Community participation and

shared responsibility were also emphasized as essential for effective vigilance. Participants encouraged neighbors to report suspicious activities, with one sharing,

"We look out for one another and report everything to our superiors… ensuring that the tragedies of the past never return" (P5).

"Whenever something is reported, we gather to discuss the best plans and actions to take… If anyone sees newcomers or strangers, they should immediately inform the barangay" (P7).

These practices align with Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) principles, which stress that solutions are most sustainable when local actors are actively involved in monitoring, decision-making, and implementation. Residents' active engagement ensures that vigilance is a collective responsibility rather than an individual task, fostering ownership and accountability (Awoyemi & Oke, 2024 Chebli & Kwon, 2022). Ethical practices, structured monitoring, and access to resources further enhance collaborative strategies. One participant shared,

"Our strategy is to always tell the truth and strictly guard every purok to ensure no unauthorized person can enter" (P11),

while another noted access to equipment provided by authorities,

"We were given radios and equipment by our government… so we can immediately prepare for it" (P4).

These actions demonstrate that trust, transparency, and material support are essential for functional early warning systems. Social cohesion and coordinated efforts among community members allow for organized coverage of the barangay, enhancing both preparedness and responsiveness. In line with Social Capital Theory and Community Resilience Theory, these mechanisms strengthen collective efficacy, ensuring that residents can detect and respond to threats efficiently while sustaining long-term community safety (Carmen et al., 2022; Sulaiman et al., 2024).

Through collaboration, early warning systems become more than just mechanisms for reporting threats, they function as platforms for community empowerment and participatory governance. Coordinated communication, joint planning, shared responsibility, and access to resources integrate local knowledge with formal support structures. This approach fosters a resilient, adaptive, and well-organized system capable of mitigating potential conflicts while reinforcing social cohesion and trust within the community. The experiences of residents involved in community-based vigilance reveal that maintaining peace and order is a collective, value-driven, and proactive endeavor. Residents act as frontline defenders, demonstrating moral courage, civic responsibility, and active engagement in monitoring, reporting, and resolving conflicts. Their coordination with local authorities, reliance on communication tools, and structured approaches enhance the effectiveness of early warning systems, while strong interpersonal networks, trust, and collaboration facilitate collective action. These practices are supported by Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) theory, which emphasizes shared responsibility and the value of local knowledge, Social Capital Theory, which highlights the role of trust and cooperation in achieving common goals and Community Resilience Theory, which explains how communities adapt, recover, and sustain vigilance over time.

The study demonstrates that community-based vigilance functions not only as a security measure but also as a mechanism for peacebuilding, social cohesion, and preventive intervention. These insights imply the need for consistent institutional support, capacity-building initiatives, broader community engagement, and attention to residents' well-being to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of early warning systems. Furthermore, future research can examine how these community-driven strategies influence long-term peace, local governance, and resilience, including the roles of youth and marginalized groups in sustaining collective security.

4.0. Conclusion and Recommendation

4.1. Conclusion

The study concludes that community-based vigilance plays a critical and multifaceted role in maintaining peace and security, with residents functioning as primary actors in monitoring, reporting, and responding to potential threats within their communities. Their active participation, grounded in a strong sense of moral and civic responsibility, demonstrates that effective early warning systems are highly dependent on grassroots engagement, social cohesion, and collective action. Despite challenges such as fear, resource limitations, and physical strain, residents exhibit resilience and sustained commitment, highlighting the importance of both human agency and institutional support in ensuring system effectiveness. Furthermore, community-led vigilance extends beyond security functions to serve as a mechanism for peacebuilding, integrating conflict prevention, social regulation, and collaborative strategies that strengthen long-term stability. Overall, the findings affirm that the success and sustainability of early warning systems rely on the interplay of participation, trust, coordination, and adaptive capacity within the community.

4.2. Recommendation

In light of these findings, it is recommended that policymakers, local government units, and partner agencies strengthen support for community-based vigilance through capacity-building programs, provision of adequate resources, and institutionalization of community security roles. Continuous training on surveillance, reporting protocols, and emergency response should be implemented, alongside the development of standardized communication systems and access to essential tools such as radios and monitoring equipment. Additionally, values formation initiatives and peace education programs should be promoted to reinforce civic responsibility and social cohesion, particularly among the youth. Psychological support and welfare mechanisms must also be established to address the emotional and physical demands faced by community volunteers. Strengthening multi-sectoral collaboration among residents, government agencies, and security forces is essential to enhance coordination, trust, and system responsiveness. Finally, future research should further examine the long-term impacts of community-based early warning systems on peacebuilding, governance, and resilience to inform more sustainable and inclusive security strategies.

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The authors have declared that no competing financial, professional or personal interests exist.

Consent for publication

Both authors contributed to the manuscript and consented to the publication of this research work.

Availability of data and material

Supplementary information such as the raw files of the participants' responses are available from the authors upon reasonable request.

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